

The Director of Central Intelligence

Washington, D.C. 20505

Trip File

6 May 1980

Dear Alex,

It was nice to hear from you, even though it made me envious that we had to leave the tennis ranch early. We certainly enjoyed that visit at John Gardiners. It came at a most appropriate time, in addition.

Unfortunately, the pressures haven't let up any since then. We hoped that the rescue effort would remove one of the big crosses that we bear. Our disappointment is intense, but we are pressing forward in every way we can.

I may be in your city for a bit on June 25th. If there is any break in the schedule, I'll give you a call in advance and see if I can drop by the store and say hello. In the meantime, Pat joins in sending our best to you and to Sandy.

Yours,

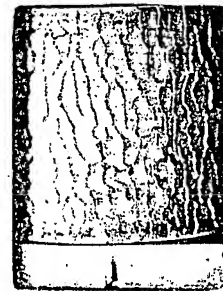
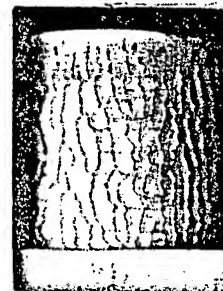

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ACTIVE SPORTSWEAR

Shields: Sportswear For a Special Customer

NEW YORK — Alexander Shields designs active sportswear for a special customer: himself, for starters.

"I'm trying to please myself, and I find there are enough people who appreciate it," he says of his clientele, most of whom he knows by name. "I don't think any of our customers jog," Shields muses. "I wonder if that says something, if that's a demographic."

"I like tennis because it's an athletic chess game. Not only are you trying to outwit your opponent, but you're trying to outwit the ball. Jogging is just exercise. I don't know what the reward and mental satisfaction is. It's sort of knocking your brains out."

Shields' sportswear is geared primarily toward tennis, although he does do beachwear and golf clothing. At least a partial reason for the tennis thrust is the fact the designer is ranked 27th in the nation in men's 55s.

"The clothing is designed to make people want to stay trim," says Shields, whose six-foot-three, 165-pound frame hasn't changed since prep school. He has little patience with the man who wants to build an image with his clothes, who expects his clothes to transform his appearance. "I think clothing can really make you look good only if you look good to begin with," he says.

A former Caltech architecture student, he says, "I have more of an architectural approach to clothing. I design around straight lines, which make you look taller and thinner."

"I used to say less is more," he continues. "Then I decided to

say lesser is better. Now I'm down to least is best. Simplification is beautification."

Along those straight lines, Shields eliminates what he considers frills — pockets and buttons. (His own sportcoats, made only for him, are completely buttonless.) Where buttons are necessary, he hides them behind fly-fronts.

"I started using 'less is more' as an excuse for removing the buttons and leaving the pockets off and making everything simpler," he explains.

"I've taken a pattern and gradually refined it until I think it's perfect. I don't think you need a half dozen jacket styles or a half dozen collar styles," Shields continues. His active line, therefore, consists of one shirt and one shirt model with one collar, one style of trouser, one swimtrunk — essentially, one everything.

"I have created a style over the years, not a fashion because a fashion becomes unfashionable," he explains. "A style endures. I don't change them, I refine them a little bit. I don't like to see menswear manufacturers try to build in obsolescence in the clothes they make."

The Shields customer is reflective of the Shields boutique on Park Avenue — subdued and classic. The designer describes his customer as a man 35 or older who is "successful or near successful."

About half of Shields' volume is done in wholesale to specialty stores across the country. He shuns the department stores because, he says, they "no longer wanted to take the time to explain the design."

Shields also cites a lack of explanation for occasional hesitant acceptance of one of his favorite fabrics: polyester. The large mills, he says, haven't put forward advertising money to make the public aware that there is such a thing as a good synthetic.

Hoecht, the German firm that manufactures Trevira, is

one exception. "They have spent a lot of time and a lot of money to prove that they are right," he says. "And they are right."

"People equate the synthetic fibers to the cheap polyesters," he says, noting that "there are polyesters as expensive as silk. There's a definite place for them."

For polyester to work, though, Shields says it "must be properly chosen, properly woven and properly knitted." He cites as an example of success a 100 per cent polyester tennis flannel he uses that's frequently mistaken for wool. The advantage, Shields says, is that his polyester flannel is woven to breathe, therefore evaporating perspiration rather than absorbing it.

Again, Shields cites his own involvement in tennis as the inspiration for his fabrications. "Most of the stuff we get from the manufacturers is designed by someone who's never been on a tennis court," he comments.

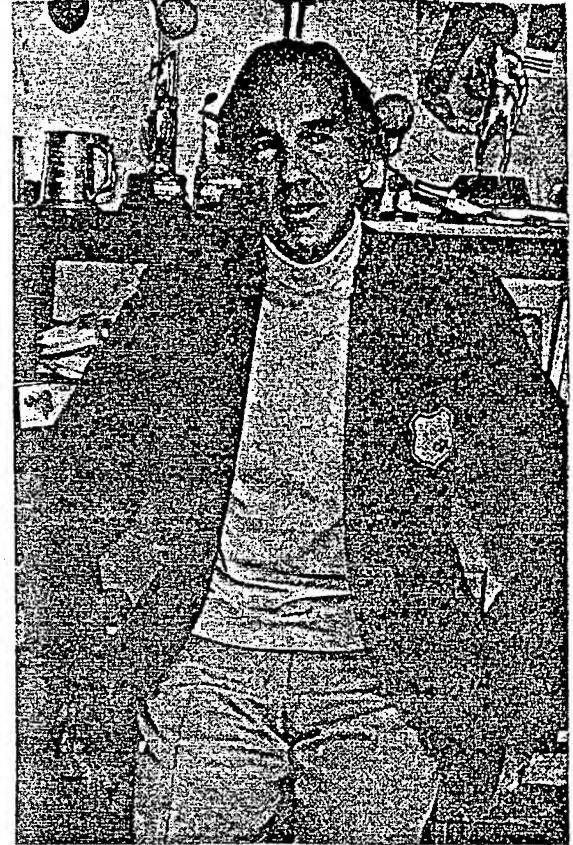
While Shields does use natural fibers, he says "I think I've been an innovator in using fabrics that have never been used before in menswear." Specifically, he mentions knitted blazers and trousers.

Shields' wife, Sandy, is also active in design and has been an integral part of the business since it was founded 33 years ago in the house of Gloria Vanderbilt's mother.

Terming it "Sandy's subliminal touch," Shields says "she passes on a very talented woman's criticisms or acceptance onto what we do."

Shields also credits his wife's touch with creating heavy ac-

ceptance among women. She adds a special effect — one that's hard to pin down — that, Shields says, "makes women buy it, take it home and tell their husbands that it's right."



Alexander Shields



BY PATRICK KELLY

DAILY NEWS RECORD

GREATMENSWEAR

Alexander Shields

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